



CITY OF MANCHESTER

Joyce Craig
Mayor

Good morning! It's a pleasure to be here with all of you.

I want to start by thanking Mike and everyone at the Chamber for hosting this annual event. It's been a pleasure working with all of you to improve our city. Your relationship with the business community is such an asset, and I'm grateful for the partnership we have.

I'd also like to thank Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health, Alumni Ventures Group and the Institute of Art and Design at New England College for sponsoring this year's State of the City.

And it's always great to be at the Institute of Politics - surrounded by fascinating political memorabilia, and taking in all that you've done over the years. Neil and his staff just finished their busy season with the First in the Nation Primary, and I'd like to congratulate all of you on a job well done.

To the residents of Manchester, here today or tuning in, I stand before you humbled and honored to be your Mayor. I love my job, and I'm grateful every day to work on your behalf.

I'm thrilled to be here today to talk about the State of our City. I'm proud of what we've accomplished, and I'm excited by what the future holds.

Over the last two years, we rolled up our sleeves, and worked together to move Manchester forward.

Our successes are rooted in our values -- improving our schools, supporting our businesses, and lifting up our neighbors. We're a city with a proud history. We're a city guided by the principles of equity and inclusion. And we're a city rightly known for our grit and determination.

These are the values and principles that drive our efforts, and why we've been able to accomplish so much over the past few years.

As many of you know, I got into public service because of my passion for education. I believe that strong schools lead to a thriving community that offers better jobs, a strengthened tax base, safer neighborhoods, and enhanced property values.

And in the past two years, we've made great progress. We worked to strengthen opportunities for our students and educators by establishing workforce development programs with Eversource and Southern New Hampshire University. We brought Spanish and French classes back to the middle schools, we decreased class sizes in the elementary schools, we launched a course where high school students are actually building a working airplane, and we approved a four year curriculum adoption schedule, starting this year with Math, and next year with Language Arts & Reading.

Thanks to many of you in this room, Manchester Proud produced the first-ever, community-based, strategic plan as a roadmap to better engage and meet the needs of our students, to support our educators, and to break down barriers so our district is truly equitable and inclusive.

It's a pivotal time to impact public education, and our community is rallying around the cause. With the adoption of the Manchester Proud plan, a new School Board that's focused on policy, and a superintendent, Dr. Goldhardt, who's vision is focused on raising the bar and lowering the barriers for all students — things are coming together.

We're raising the bar by establishing bold goals, such as: a 100 percent high school graduation rate, having all students reading at or above grade level by 3rd grade, and increasing enrollment in advanced placement and college enrollment courses by 25 percent for students of color or whose families fall below the poverty line.

As a District, we're raising the bar for our students — and together with our community, we're lowering the barriers.

We're lowering the barriers through community partners like Brady Sullivan, who **I'm pleased to announce is donating \$10,000 to ensure students enrolled in AP courses, who may not otherwise have the financial means, can now afford to take the AP tests.**

We're lowering the barriers through programs like the Bookmobile, a partnership between the Manchester City Library and the School District, that's focused on bringing books directly to kids, encouraging families to read together, and combatting summer learning loss. Over the past two years, they've given away more than 6,000 books to students across the city.

Recently, the program was in jeopardy because the current Bookmobile van is old and needs a lot of work. **Today, I'm pleased to share that by this summer, we'll have a new Bookmobile hitting the streets of Manchester, thanks to a generous donation from Quirk Auto Dealers.**

And, we're lowering the barriers through opportunities like GEAR UP, which has provided staff and programming in all of our middle schools, and next year in our high schools. They're encouraging our students to have high expectations, stay in school, study hard, and take the right courses to go to college — helping them to chart a path toward high school graduation and college and career success.

I believe we're experiencing the most exciting time for public education our city has ever seen. In the coming years, we'll continue to design innovative programs and drive new ideas. And I'm confident, under the leadership of Dr. Goldhardt and his team, we'll soon have a fair and sustainable contract for our educators.

One of the most important things we can do for our children is to implement responsible policies today that ensure a healthy and prosperous tomorrow. In our schools and in our government, we've implemented policies to develop sustainable practices and ensure the vitality of our community for decades to come.

As a result of our proactive efforts, we've seen a 42 percent reduction in energy costs in the last decade. We converted all 9,000 of our streetlights to LED, we're replacing 14 school buses with cleaner ones using propane, and we'll soon begin the city's first-ever large scale solar project.

At this time, due to state law, we're limited to a one megawatt net metering cap for our solar project. However, we have, and will continue, to advocate for increased net metering legislation to expand our clean energy options, and decrease energy costs for ratepayers.

Since 2010, energy and sustainability initiatives have reduced our city's CO2 emissions by more than 30 percent. **And today, I'm proud to say the City of Manchester is committed to its status as an environmental pioneer in New Hampshire, and we have established a goal of 50 percent reduction in CO2 emissions by 2030.**

Through energy-efficiency projects we're working to keep energy costs down, reduce our city's carbon footprint, and help to conserve our natural resources.

Over the last two years, the Manchester Water Works, together with the Forest Society, have permanently preserved over 2,000 acres of land surrounding Lake Massabesic. By preserving our natural resources, and guaranteeing this land will never be developed, we're ensuring our water quality will remain pristine for generations to come.

And providing clean, high-quality drinking water is a primary goal of our city. Thanks to Director Phil Croasdale and his team, Manchester drinking water is nationally recognized. In fact, they've received the distinction for "Excellence in Water Treatment " for the 8th year in a row, a recognition only 10 other utilities in the country have received.

As we continue to conserve our natural resources, we must also support residents and programs that help make our community healthy, strong and vibrant.

Our diversity is one of our city's greatest strengths. I've worked hard to ensure our boards and commissions represent our community, but I know there's more to be done. **Which is why, I'm pleased to announce the formation of the Mayor's Multicultural Advisory Council.** This council will serve as a link between city government and our community to enhance engagement, strengthen relationships, and ensure all residents feel welcomed, respected and accepted.

We have two members of the council here with us today, Arnold Mikolo and Kile Adewume, can you please stand and be recognized?

Diversity is a critical factor for a thriving, prosperous city, and I look forward to working with this council to ensure that intentional efforts are made to further support all of our city's residents.

Manchester is known for our creative economy, innovative businesses, and entrepreneur-friendly environment. Over the past two years, we've seen over \$250 million dollars in new, private investments in economic development.

We were the first city in the country to test the FedEx autonomous delivery robot. And, a few weeks ago, Dean Kamen's Advanced Regenerative Manufacturing Institute (ARMI) received a \$51 million dollar federal grant to develop technology to produce medications and vaccines for places where medicines are difficult to deliver.

As a city, we're working to integrate this innovation into the fabric of local government.

One of the biggest opportunities is through the Manchester-Boston Regional Airport. Director Ted Kitchens and his team have accomplished quite a bit in a short amount of time. From expanding air service with flights to Washington-Dulles and Chicago O'Hare, to restructuring debt service to lower overall costs for airlines, to realizing a record-breaking year for cargo — we have reason to be optimistic for 2020.

Our airport is consistently ranked as one of the best regional airports in the country. And with the work that's underway, we're hopeful about future air service enhancements. But we need your help. We need to show consumer demand for flights, so the next time you're planning a trip, be sure to skip all the traffic, headaches, crowds, and expensive parking in Boston and fly Manchester!

To build upon the development we're seeing across the city, it's time to expand public transportation options and bring rail to Manchester. Just last week, Senator Hassan introduced legislation to increase federal funding for passenger rail from Boston to Nashua and Manchester. Expanded commuter rail will allow Manchester to experience new economic development opportunities, attract a youthful workforce, expand public transit opportunities and reduce traffic on I-93.

Director Mike Whitten and his team at the Manchester Transit Authority (MTA), are continually working to improve bus service across the city. High school students can now ride an MTA bus anywhere in the city, free of charge. The city now owns its own trolley, which is available for rent. And for the second holiday season in a row, we offered free bus service along South Willow Street, resulting in a 17.5 percent increase in ridership.

To further encourage bus ridership, I'm pleased to announce that beginning this July, all passengers that take Bus #1—which travels to the VA Hospital and Dartmouth-Hitchcock from downtown—will be able to ride for free thanks to the generosity of Dartmouth-Hitchcock.

The City's community-driven master plan will provide a roadmap for how Manchester enters the future, and is on track for completion this fall. It will address needs and opportunities such as arts and culture, walkability and affordable housing.

New Hampshire is in the midst of an affordable housing crisis and in Manchester, we're facing the most challenging housing environment in decades. Rental costs are at a historic high, while rental vacancy rates are near an all-time low. **So today, I'm announcing the establishment of a Housing Task Force to address this critical issue.** Through research, discussions, and community and stakeholder engagement, the task force will provide recommendations that respond to both the assumptions and the realities of affordable housing in Manchester.

To continue attracting people and businesses to Manchester, we're planning on adding additional public spaces across the city to improve quality of life.

This spring, thanks to the U.S. Soccer Foundation and Southern New Hampshire University, we're installing a new soccer mini pitch between Gossler Park Elementary and Parkside Middle Schools. And we're renovating the basketball court at Pulaski Park, thanks to the Kiwanis Club of Manchester.

Later this year, we'll break ground on a new splash pad and playground at Sheehan-Basquill Park. And when I present my budget at the end of the month, I'll be recommending the construction of pickleball courts at Prout Park and a skateboarding half pipe at Rock Rimmon.

In our efforts to make Manchester a more bike and pedestrian-friendly city, this year, we're adding more bike lanes and rail trails to our expanding network of bicycle-friendly infrastructure.

Our community is coming together to make our city more vibrant. But while our economic and cultural opportunities are many, we must also continue to make progress on important social challenges.

The challenges we face today—the addiction epidemic, homelessness, mental illness—did not arise overnight, and are not specific to our community. These issues are complex, and there's no simple solution, but by working together, we will continue to make positive change.

Chief Dan Goonan and the Manchester Fire Department continue to be on the front line of the addiction epidemic.

Safe Station is an effective access point for treatment and recovery — data shows that individuals are 53 percent less likely to overdose after visiting a Safe Station.

As a result of the efforts of our Fire Department and community partners, including American Medical Response, the Mental Health Center of Greater Manchester, Farnum Center, Families in Transition - New Horizons, Catholic Medical Center and Elliot Health Systems, we're saving lives.

In the past two years, we've seen a continual decrease in opioid overdoses. 2018 and 2019 both saw 19 percent reductions in overdoses, and AMR is projecting a 26 percent decrease in 2020.

This year, we opened our Emergency Operations Center to better coordinate efforts to assist individuals who are dealing with addiction, homelessness and mental health issues.

This work has strengthened our emergency sheltering efforts, thanks in large part to our first responders, health department, and outreach workers. I'd also like to take a moment to recognize Pastor John Riviera and Hope Tabernacle. On extremely cold nights, when the shelter was full, Pastor Riviera and volunteers opened their doors and provided a caring atmosphere and shelter to our most vulnerable residents. Pastor Rivera and his wife Evelyn are here with us today, can you please stand and be recognized?

There's still more work to do, and we'll continue to call upon the state to increase treatment options and open more emergency shelter beds across the state. Manchester can't solve the state's issues alone, and we'll continue to advocate for increased services for all Granite Staters.

Through hard work and collaboration, we've been able to bring in more state and federal funding to build critical infrastructure around data and emergency management, thanks to the work of Health Director Anna Thomas and her team.

They play a critical role in everything from the city's planning efforts for COVID-19, establishing interventions for children in our schools, and helping first responders with compassion fatigue.

Plus, thanks to their work, the Health Department was able to bring the Manchester Police Department their first-ever comfort dog, who is here with us today!

I'm excited to announce that you'll be able to vote on a name for our comfort dog starting today — the options are Patch, Amos, Sam, Harry and Rex. My favorite is Patch, which is short for dispatch. Visit the Manchester Police Department's Facebook page to cast your vote.

Our police department, led by Chief Carlo Capano, is working diligently to keep our community safe. Over the last two years, we've approved the hiring of 15 new police officers and will add 10 additional officers in July — resulting in the largest complement the Manchester Police Department has ever had.

With more officers patrolling our streets, and by utilizing evidence-based practices, we're working to reduce response times and prevent crime. These efforts have continued the downward trend in the city's crime rate for the fifth year in a row — and resulted in a four percent decrease in crime last year.

There's no doubt Manchester has made tremendous progress over the past two years.

We're strengthening our schools to ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed.

We're strengthening our economy to help our businesses thrive.

We're strengthening our community to provide a better future for our residents.

The state of our city is strong, and our future is bright.

It's an honor to serve as your mayor. I look forward to working with all of you to continue making Manchester a better place. Thank you.